October 17, 1973

Dr. Jeffrey Wolstenholme
The Ciba Foundation
41 Portland Place
London W1 ENGLAND

Dear Jeffrey,

To be sure that you have adequate time to think about it, I am making herewith a suggestion for a symposium topic that you might wish to adopt for 1978. This will be the 50th anniversary of the publication of Griffith' epochal paper on the phenomenon of transformation in the pneumococcus. The Society for General Microbiology already has an annual Griffith lecture which might give you some hints as to the significance that Griffith has had in modern biology. You may also have noted some running controversial correspondence in the pages of Nature, to which I enclose one key for retrieval.

The renovation of biology that has accompanied the discovery of DNA as the genetic chemical substance, and the elaboration of knowledge concerning its specificity, structure, and synthesis, already becoming history. This turning is widely regarded as one of the major revolutions in biological science, no less significant than the Darwinian and the Mendelian revolutions.

I had in mind a symposium that would attempt to document more carefully than has been done so far the intellectual history that led to these innovations of biological thought, as well as an appreciation of the current status of the "DNA doctrine" in a variety of fields. The most obvious of these, apart from cross-breeding genetics itself, would be enzyme induction and immunology. Cancer is in a somewhat intermediate position. We still have much to learn about the nexus of DNA and consciousness.

Robert Olby is a young historian at Leeds who has addressed himself to some of the more philosophical aspects of these questions. A symposium in 1978 might be timely also because a somewhat diminished but still important number of personalities will still be living and available to help document the transition in thinking that this half century has encompassed. The most articulate writing in this field has been confined to Him Watson's "The Double Helix" and "Phage and the Origin of Molecular Biology". Many biologists are concerned that these representations are only part of an accurate picture of the development of contemporary biology.

Martin Pollack is another colleague whom I would certainly urge you to correspond with concerning the plausibility of my suggestion and ways in which it might be implemented.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr